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HISTORIES
BOOK I

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INTRODUCTION

'Had forgetting been as much in our power as silence, we would have destroyed memory along with speech.' So writes T. of the dark days of Domitian's reign (A.D. 81–96; *Agr.* 2.3). But by 98 or so when he writes these words Domitian is dead and a new dynasty is in power. Silence (at least about the past) is no longer necessary nor is forgetting so much to be desired. T., now in middle age, nearly done with the senator's *cursus honorum*, devotes himself henceforth to *memoria*. There will even be pleasure, he predicts, in the story of the servitude that silenced senatorial speech, given the lively contrast between that past and a present of (he says) *princeps*-guaranteed *libertas* (*Agr.* 3.2). T. was well placed to write of both past and present.

1 THE SENATOR

'From Galba, Otho, and Vitellius I received neither benefit nor harm. That my career was initiated by Vespasian, advanced by Titus, and carried further by Domitian I do not deny' (*H.* 1.1.3). Birth in A.D. 56 or 57 is deduced from the dates of the political offices alluded to in the foregoing quotation (praetor in 88, suffect consul in 97, evidence that converges with a reference to himself as 'quite a young man' (*D.* 1.2 *iuuenis admodum*) at the dramatic date of the *Dialogus*, A.D. 74/5; see further Syme (1958) 59–74). T.'s father was perhaps the equestrian procurator of Gallia Belgica mentioned as a contemporary by Pliny the Elder (*Nat.* 7.76). His family's origin may lie in Transpadane Italy or, more probably, in Narbonese Gaul (Syme (1958) 618–24), but the earliest years of his life were passed in (for us) complete obscurity. Not even his praenomen is known with certainty: he may be a Gaius or a Publius. By 74/5 he was in Rome, training himself for a senatorial career by attending on the leading speakers of the day (*D.* 2.1). T. was granted the *latus clauus* (i.e. the right to wear a tunic with a broad purple stripe as a badge of prospective senatorial rank) by Vespasian (*H.* 1.1.3). The first (unattested) stages of his senatorial career must have been membership in the vigintivirate in Rome followed by military service as *tribunus laticlauius*. In 77 he married into the senatorial family of Cn. Julius Agricola (*Agr.* 9.6). T. is next attested in 88, when he was praetor and one of the *XV viri sacris faciundis* who, along with the emperor Domitian, organized

the Secular Games in that year (*A.* 11.11.1). Abroad on public service when Agricola died on 23 August 93 (*Agr.* 45.5), T. returned to Rome after an absence of some three years to hold a suffect consulship in the second half of 97. An inscription in Asia Minor informs us that T. reached the summit of a senatorial career, the proconsulship of Asia, in 112/3 (*OGIS* 487, with Syme (1958) 664–5 for the date). He cannot have died before the extension of Roman dominion to the Red Sea, territory first conquered on Trajan's Parthian campaigns of 115/6, to which he refers at *A.* 2.61.2.[1]

2 THE ORATOR

By 98 T. had spent some two decades in service to the state. The Flavian peace had established itself, imperial power had passed from father to son and brother to brother. As one of the 'sad, submissive senators' of Domitian's reign he had had a share in the governance of the empire: in elections, legislation, trials, religious business, provincial affairs (Talbert (1984) 341–491; quotation from Syme (1958) 76). But for all this apparent activity these were years of intellectual and moral inertia according to T. (*Agr.* 3.1–2). After fifteen years of it Domitian's assassination gave the senate a greater charge: to choose a new *princeps*. And one year into Nerva's reign came T.'s suffect consulship (in September and October of 97, months that revealed the necessity of equipping Nerva with an heir quickly; see 15.1 n. *in . . . fertur*). As consul T. also bade an official farewell to a survivor from the past, Verginius Rufus, an important, if enigmatic, figure in the civil war that brought the Flavian house to power (8.2 n.). It was an honour befitting T.'s high reputation as an orator (Plin. *Ep.* 2.1.6 *laudator eloquentissimus*, cf. *Ep.* 1.20.24, 7.20.4, 9.23.2). In 100 he, with Pliny, successfully prosecuted an extortion case against a former governor of the province of Africa, Marius Priscus (Plin. *Ep.* 2.11).

3 THE WRITER: *AGRICOLA*, *GERMANIA*, *DIALOGUS*

With speaking came writing. In 98 he published the *Agricola*, a biography of his father-in-law, which tries to reclaim something from the moral wasteland

[1] A recent re-examination of a long-known inscription (*CIL* VI 1574) may have yielded further information on career and connections, but the identification of the stone's subject and our author is not firmly established. See Alföldy (1995).

of Domitian's principate (*Agr.* 42.4 *sciant . . . posse etiam sub malis principibus magnos uiros esse*). In close sequence, before or after, came the *Germania*, part ethnography of the Germani, Rome's most troublesome neighbours (*G.* 37.5 *triumphati magis quam uicti sunt*), part meditation on the ills besetting Rome. A third short work, the *Dialogue on Orators*, is variously dated (by conjecture) between 96 and 103.[2] Though its format distances the work from its author – it is ostensibly the report of a discussion heard by a young and silent T. – the *Dialogus* is in fact one of his most personal works and marks a crucial stage in his literary development.

T. announces the dialogue as a vehicle for explaining the decline of Roman oratory but begins it with a vignette advertising the effectiveness of poetry, specifically tragedy, as political commentary: the poet-provocateur Maternus hones his *Cato*, which had already offended many, and gives notice that his *Thyestes* will be stronger still (*D.* 3.2–3). But despite its striking picture of a contemporary poet, the defence of poetry as a genre in this work is curiously superficial. There is no reply, for example, to the charge that Maternus' tragedies cause offence without benefiting anyone, a charge that T. himself advances against other recalcitrants (*D.* 9.2, 9.4, 10.6, cf. *Agr.* 42.5 *in nullum rei publicae usum ambitiosa morte inclaruerunt*).[3] The decline of oratory receives more thorough scrutiny. Various causes are adduced; the final explanation is a political one: oratory flourishes in a state where decisions are collective because the orator's art enables him to sway assemblies, but it is empty in a state whose important decisions were made by a ruler who was *sapientissimus et unus* (*D.* 41.4).

The problem with oratory as a genre at the end of the first century A.D. was fundamentally a problem of audience. To whom could one speak? Or, more precisely, given the possible audiences, what was worth saying? The *plebs*, no longer called upon to decide anything, was better 'addressed' via *beneficia* (including 'bread and circuses': Juv. 10.78–81). The senate too often refused to decide matters that came before it. A *princeps* was swayed not by rhetorical skill but by associates – freedmen, family members, *delatores*, *socii laborum* – equipped with a keen sense of psychology. The courtroom (more

[2] For discussion and bibliography see C. O. Brink, 'Can the *Dialogus* be dated? Evidence and historical conclusions', *HSCP* 96 (1994) 251–80.

[3] The point of such sallies might be clearer if we knew what happened to Maternus between the dramatic date of the *Dialogus* (74/5) and its composition (*c.* 96–103), but we do not: see T. D. Barnes, 'The significance of Tacitus' *Dialogus de Oratoribus*', *HSCP* 90 (1986) 227–44.

specifically, the Centumviral court) remained a venue for speech-making, but if Pliny is an accurate guide it elicited a sadly diminished product. Practical barristers were eager to get their cases over with as quickly as possible (*Ep.* 6.2.5), ambitious ones hired claques to vaunt their praises (*Ep.* 2.14.4–11). One observer announced the death of oratory ('*centumuiri, hoc artificium periit*', *Ep.* 2.14.11), another brought Cato's famous definition of the orator (*uir bonus dicendi peritus*) up to date by saying '*orator est uir malus dicendi imperitus*' (*Ep.* 4.7.5). Epictetus describes contemporary senatorial utterance in terms that are perhaps appropriately bleak: 'a cold, miserable remnant suspended from idle argumentations by a hair' (*Diss.* 4.1.140). A popular signet ring emblem at this period was the figure of Harpocrates, who, according to Plutarch, 'keeps his finger on his lip in token of restrained speech or silence' (Plut. *Mor.* 378c; see Plin. *Nat.* 33.41 for the rings).

The subject of the *Dialogus* has been well described as 'the proper relationship between existing literary forms and public life in a depoliticized society' (Fantham (1996) 286). Rejecting poetry and oratory, two (but only two) of the 'existing literary forms', the *Dialogus* leaves the way open for a third genre, history.[4]

4 THE HISTORIAN

In the preface to *H.* T. maintains that the present is 'a happy age in which it is permitted to feel what you wish and say what you feel' (1.4). But he was not so rash as to test the limits of permissibility by writing about the present, a topic twice deferred (see n.). Instead, he offers a history of the period that coincided with his own youth and rising career, the brief reigns of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, and the longer span of Flavian dominance, twenty-eight years all told (69–96), covered in some twelve or fourteen books.[5] We surmise from Pliny's letters on the A.D. 79 eruption of Vesuvius that T. was at work on *H.* in *c.* 106 (*Ep.* 6.16, 20). It is presumed that he completed *H.* before moving on to the *Annals*, a work that took him back to the Julio-Claudian period. But the extant books (1–4 and twenty-six

[4] The choice of literary form also exercised Pliny, who saw history as the genre most likely to yield its author lasting fame: *itaque diebus ac noctibus cogito, si* '*qua me quoque possim tollere humo*' . . . *quod prope sola historia polliceri uidetur* (*Ep.* 5.8.3, cf. *Ep.* 9.27 on the *numen historiae*).

[5] For the historiographical tradition in which T. was writing see M–W 1–10. For discussion and bibliography on the number of books in the *Histories* see C. S. Kraus and A. J. Woodman (1997). *Latin Historians.* Oxford, 91–2.

chapters of Book 5) treat only the civil wars of 69 and the first few months of Vespasian's reign.

5 *CVRA POSTERITATIS*

Questions of aim and method appear with particular urgency at the outset of an author's work in a new genre. Some are answered by the programmatic preface to *H.*; for others elucidation comes from the narrative itself.

Book 1 begins on a sombre note. The histories of the period since the battle of Actium are a disappointing lot: the authors were small talents hampered by political ignorance and by the passions and pressures of life under a *princeps*. Truth suffered, and so did posterity, for subservience and hatred were selfish indulgences in an historian. There is a promise implicit in this brief paraphrase of 1.1–3 that T. will do better. He enunciates a general principle: integrity requires an historian to present the figures who appear in the narrative without favour or hatred (1.3 *incorruptam fidem professis neque amore quisquam et sine odio dicendus est*). The opening paragraph of his work thus presents history as a literary form with the potential to succeed where, according to the *Dialogus*, oratory and poetry fail: the truth can be told.

But the truth will benefit posterity only if it gets read, so the table of contents contained in the second and third paragraphs of the preface promises both exciting material (assassinations, civil war, natural disasters, human havoc) and broad coverage (in the empire, provinces from Britain to Parthia; in the natural world, land, sea, and sky; in society, ranks from noble to slave). The content of the projected work is closer to Thucydides' catalogue of suffering in the human and natural spheres (1.23) than to Herodotus' 'great and amazing deeds of both Greeks and barbarians' (1.1). But if T.'s chosen period is not happy, it is significant: even the adulteries are *magna adulteria* (2.2). There will be the occasional patch of something brighter (3.1 *bona exempla*), but as a whole the narrative will, he claims, illustrate an important fact, that 'it is not our peace that is of concern to the gods, but our punishment' (3.2 *non esse curae deis securitatem nostram, esse ultionem*).

Woodman argues that this table of contents advertises a disaster narrative with all the ingredients of 'pleasurable historiography' ((1988) 165–7). He makes the important point that T. is writing as a survivor in a state

that survived all of the disasters he is about to relate, which means that the darkness of his chosen period is set off by the brighter frame of a glorious past and a happy present. But to say that 'his interest in the disasters centres primarily on their capacity to furnish gripping narrative material' (167) is to ignore the note of moral seriousness first sounded in *cura posteritatis* and heard on every page of T.'s historical work.

The inadequacy of the 'pleasure principle' for explaining T.'s achievement can be seen in one of the most gripping narratives in Book 1, the story of the collective mad-scene in chapters 80–5, where the praetorian rank-and-file runs amok and threatens, Ajax-like, to slaughter Otho's senatorial dinner guests. Disaster is in fact averted and the *status quo* is altered but little as a result of the uprising, yet T. gives the story full-dress treatment over more than five chapters, including a long speech, several fine epigrams, and memorable scenes such as that of senators and their wives creeping through the back streets of Rome in quest of anonymity, and a teary-eyed emperor standing on a dining couch to address frantic and blood-stained guardsmen. Here, if anywhere in Book 1, is an event told for its lively qualities. But it would be a mistake so to describe it. Although the year 69 gets more space than any other year covered by T. (three full books; A.D. 15 with forty-nine chapters in *Annals* 1 is the next fullest), T. has made a careful selection from the possible material (see below for omissions). The praetorian riot earned admission not only for its innate drama, but also for its connection to the single most prominent theme in the narrative of that 'long and single year', the collapse of military discipline. The uprising poses a challenge to the principle that Otho articulates at 83.3: *si, cur iubeantur, quaerere singulis liceat, pereunte obsequio etiam imperium intercidit.* By his own standards Otho's *auctoritas* will prove insufficient in Book 2, and understanding why he fails is essential preparation for understanding why Vespasian succeeds.

6 *RATIO CAVSAEQVE*

Besides telling the truth and offering an exciting story about a significant, if depressing, period, the historian aims to show cause and effect (4.1). To sample the quality of T.'s explanations we will look at one small and three large historical questions posed by the events narrated in Book 1.

The small question first: Why did the legions of Upper Germany despise their legate, Hordeonius Flaccus? To this question we have answers from both T. and Plutarch. According to T., old age, ill-health, and a weak

character were Flaccus' undoing: 9.1 *Flaccum spernebat, senecta ac debilitate pedum inualidum, sine constantia, sine auctoritate*. In place of age and character Plutarch cites inexperience: *G.* 18.4 'Flaccus, physically incapacitated by acute gout and without practical experience, was a complete cipher to them.' These two sentences clearly reflect a single model and agree on the role of illness, but their content is not quite the same, indeed old age and inexperience might seem to be mutually exclusive (see further §§10, 18 below). The similarity of sentence structure suggests that the source both reported the soldiers' scorn and explained it. If T. reflects the source faithfully, then the source's explanation is fully borne out by Flaccus' behaviour in 69 and 70, which T. reports in great detail. On the other hand, if Plutarch's explanation, inexperience, is that of the source, then T. has discarded the source's implausible explanation – Flaccus commanded three legions in an important military zone – and added two new ones, one of which, old age, makes Flaccus resemble his principal, Galba, while the other, weak character, is justified by a damning train of events. (If neither author reflects the source all we can say is that T.'s story is internally consistent and well connected to the larger narrative.)

Character is also T.'s explanation for the first of the three larger questions we will consider, namely, why did Galba fall? In chh. 4–20 T. shows that Galba failed at the crucial task of building support for his rule: he did nothing to undo the alienation of the German legions arising from their conflict with his supporter Vindex (8.2), he threw away the nascent loyalty of the praetorians by refusing them a donative (18.3), he forfeited his title to moral leadership by allowing his associates free rein (6.1), and he chose a successor who brought him no new support (15.1 n. *in . . . fertur*). The essence of T.'s explanation appears in his famous epigram on Galba, 49.4 *consensu omnium capax imperii nisi imperasset* – he was not up to the job.

The second question is why Otho succeeded. To this T. gives a different sort of answer: it was not primarily character that brought Otho to the throne but external circumstances. Otho saw the discontent that Galba's inadequacy engendered and the breakdown of military discipline that civil discord allowed and capitalized on both problems, cultivating the goodwill of the praetorians and any other soldiers to whom he had access (chh. 23–4) and encouraging sedition (ch. 25). Not crippled by an out-of-date moral code, he suited his actions to the current situation and rose to the top on the strong shoulders of the praetorians. Intelligence had something to do with his success, and indeed his grasp of political realities allowed him to

weather several crises once he was in power, but without the circumstances of discontent and indiscipline he would have achieved little.

A third question T.'s narrative prompts us to ask is why the German legions revolted. To this question, which was a crucial one given the military underpinnings of the *princeps*' power, T.'s answer is complex and rich in detail. The attitude of the legions is one factor: a recent easy victory had aroused their confidence and whetted their appetite for the rewards of victory (51.1). The difficulty of maintaining military discipline when loyalty was bought and sold and betrayal unpunished is another (51.2). Long-standing hostilities between Gallic tribes in the vicinity fed the legions' eagerness for a fight (51.4, 53.3), and the legions' insecurity about Galba's intentions for them kept the situation unsettled (51.5, 53.2). There was also the rivalry between the two armies of Germany (53.2), which was exacerbated by the selfish disloyalty of individual officers who had nothing to hope for in a stable state (52.3). Such men worked their will on the weak character of Vitellius (52.4), who had inherited a *dignitas* bigger than he could manage (9.1 n.). Then one has to consider human nature: T. cites the ease with which bad men come together for violent ends (54.3). And this is just the introduction to the narrative; further circumstantial factors are given as the story proceeds.

Comparison with Plutarch's explanation is again instructive. According to Plutarch, the German legions share the empire-wide disappointment over Galba's failure to pay a donative and are particularly offended by the fallout from Vindex' revolt (e.g. Galba's removal of Verginius Rufus from the German command and the rewards and honours that accrued to Vindex' memory and supporters, *G.* 22). Where the biographer mentions triggers specific to this occasion, the historian, while including specifics (and many more of them), looks beyond them to systemic conditions (civil war, inter-tribal and inter-army rivalries, personal ambition) that loosen the military discipline upon which the peace of the empire depends.

Causae for events of lesser moment in *Histories* 1 include human nature (12.2, 18.3, 32.1, 34.2, 38.3, 54.3, 55.1, 55.4, 56.2, 80.2, 87.2, 90.3) and, very occasionally, chance (*forte* at 7.1 and 31.1, *fortuitis . . . causis* at 86.3). As a general explanation for the miseries of the Flavian period as a whole T. mentions divine punishment in the preface, but this theme is absent from the narrative so far as we have it. Fate is never cited except as a belief of historical figures (18.1 n. *fato manent*) or qualified by *uelut* (50.1, 71.2). There are also explanations that are strikingly modern in their attention to economic

factors (46.2–4nn.) and natural causes (Tiber flood 86.2–3nn.). Some regrettable incidents are in the end inexplicable, particularly where human behaviour is involved, the behaviour of the Vitellian army commanded by Fabius Valens upon arrival in Divodurum, for example. Received amicably, they slaughter some four thousand Gauls and are with difficulty prevented from destroying the entire city. The monstrosity of their act defies rational explanation: 63.1 *non ob praedam aut spoliandi cupidine, sed furore et rabie et causis incertis*.

Apart from this last case, which has few parallels in *Histories* 1, the explanations that we have seen so far are by and large rational: evidence and explanation agree. Style, while it may enhance the impact of an explanation (as in the epigram on Galba), does not stand in for evidence. Some of T.'s other explanations, however, seem to demand assent rather than understanding. A single example will suffice here; the topic will be discussed more fully below. At 59.1 T. reports Vitellius' execution of four centurions. Nomen and cognomen are tolled for each. Then comes the explanation: they were 'condemned for the crime of loyalty' (*damnatos fidei crimine*). To the question, why were they killed? the neutral answer would have been 'because they were loyal to Galba', a fact that was documented at 56.1 *cum protegerent Galbae imagines*. In T.'s answer style – an oxymoron – weighs in to charge those responsible for the centurions' deaths with a perverse morality in which *fides* is a *crimen*. Here the explanation goes well beyond the evidence provided. Stylistic effects such as this are reserved for moments of special bitterness, where explanation is not enough.

At 2.101.1 T. himself points out an incident in the work of his predecessors where assertions pose as explanations. Apropos of the desertion of Vitellius for Vespasian by two key commanders, he says 'writers who composed histories of this war while the Flavian house was in power put this down as concern for peace and love of country, but these causes have been fabricated to please' (*corruptas in adulationem causas*). These *corruptae causae* involve the attribution of motive (*rei publicae cura*, *amor*) and are themselves explained as pursuit of favour in their authors. T.'s professions of impartiality – implicit here but explicit in his prologues – have provoked many readers (see Luce (1989)). Is he so naive as to believe that the causes of bias are limited to past or potential advantage or injury to the historian himself? And if he is not so naive, how, given the manifestly engagé character of his narrative, can we avoid charging him with hypocrisy? But in *Histories* 1, at least, T.'s explanations are for the most part qualitatively different from

these *corruptae causae*. His passions come through rather in the colouring (see below). T.'s confidence in the historian's ability to explain is at a high-water mark here at the outset of the *Histories*; several passages in the *Annals* suggest a significant retreat (e.g. 3.18.4 *ludibria rerum mortalium*, 6.22.1 *mihi haec ac talia audienti in incerto iudicium est fatone res mortalium et necessitate immutabili an forte uoluantur*).

Some of T.'s explanations rely heavily on the reader. For example, the reader of *Histories* 1 needs to perceive the extent to which the description of the sedition given by Galba's advisors in sections 32–3 diverges from that given by T. himself in the preceding chapters in order to realize that T. means their advice to seem flawed. Readers of *H.* need to be particularly alert to repeated incidents, for Vespasian was preceded by three emperors who got as far as he did but failed to keep their footing there. In essence T. has to tell the stories of fall (Galba, Otho, Vitellius) and rise (Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian) three times each, and the mistakes of Vespasian's predecessors help explain Vespasian's success.

The events leading up to each emperor's proclamation, for example, reflect the claimants: Otho's is characterized by subterfuge and small numbers (chh. 24–7), Vitellius' by his passivity and the troops' disorder (55–57.1), Vespasian's by his own careful deliberations and the honest enthusiasm of his men (2.74–5, 2.79–80.1). Supporters can also be compared: Otho's are of low status (Maevius Pudens, Onomastus, and *duo manipulares*, 24–5), Vitellius' have rank but also crime and character flaws (Caecina Alienus, Fabius Valens), while Vespasian relies on Mucianus (whose record was mixed but in whom this enterprise brought out the best: 10.1nn.) and his own son Titus. (Vespasian does end up with unsavoury supporters – Antonius Primus, for example (2.86.1 *legibus nocens*), and Cornelius Fuscus (he had a taste for *noua*, *ambigua*, and *ancipitia*: 2.86.3) – but these are opportunists who sign up once movement is under way, not the inner circle.) When they actually begin the business of governing, Otho and Vitellius are shown so subservient to their troops that they are unable to oppose the soldiers' (bloodthirsty) wishes except by guile (58.2n. *occidere . . . fallendo*); Vespasian's *initia* reveal an expert in the practical business of running a campaign: 2.82.1 conscription, recall of veterans, arrangements for weapons manufacture and coinage, 2.82.3 foreign borders secured, 2.84.1–2 revenue; in short, *ea cuncta per idoneos ministros suis quaeque locis festinabantur* (2.82.1). And finally there are mistakes that Vespasian does not make: absent from the account of Vespasian's start are the statue-smashing (41.1, 55.3; indeed

Antonius Primus has *imagines* of Galba re-erected at 3.7.2), the deaths of loyal centurions (43.1, 59.1), the paranoia (25.2, 51.5, 54.1), and the greed (24.1, 51.4; at 2.82.2 Vespasian's men get an appropriate donative but no inducement to hanker after more). Vespasian's party does not remain (and perhaps never was) a paragon, of course, but by T.'s account it begins well, and Book 1's account of the reigns that preceded his is crucial for showing how it did so. (Incidents that allow a comparison between two or more of the emperors of 69 are listed in App. 3.)

7 *EXEMPLA*

A fourth element of T.'s historiographical programme is moral evaluation. *Exempla* are promised in the preface to *H.*, and by the time T. was writing the *Annals* giving memory's due to virtues and making warnings of crimes had come to seem of primary importance (*A.* 3.65.1 *quod praecipuum munus annalium reor, ne uirtutes sileantur utque prauis dictis factisque ex posteritate et infamia metus sit*; see Luce (1991) and, for a different view, Woodman (1995)). In all of T.'s work *mala exempla* are more numerous than *bona*; this is particularly true of *Histories* 1. Of the virtuous acts listed in ch. 3 – mothers accompanying exiled children, wives accompanying exiled husbands, loyal assistance from friends, relatives, and even slaves, death bravely met – only the last figures in Book 1, and that only once. It gets suitable fanfare: 43.1 *insignem illa die uirum Sempronium Densum aetas nostra uidit. Mala exempla*, being so much more numerous, are woven into the narrative with greater subtlety (see below).

8 *CHRONOLOGY*

It remains to mention a matter that T. does not address explicitly in *H.* but that can be inferred from his practice. Chronological precision *per se* was clearly not a priority for T. Chronology matters in his account of Galba's decision to adopt Piso and in his version of the encounter of Julius Atticus and Galba, so he provides the necessary temporal indications (12.1 n. *paucis . . . diebus*, 35.2n. *Iulius Atticus speculator*). But he leaves modern historians groping for the dates of the Vitellian crossings of the Alps (66.3n. *sic . . . peruentum*, 70.3n. *hibernis adhuc Alpibus*), the departure of Otho's naval expedition (87.1 n. *Narbonensem . . . statuit*), the praetorian riot (80–5n.), and more. In the case of the last incident, which was discussed above, it is clear why: in T.'s view the story illustrates the consequences of the collapse of

military discipline and for that purpose its date is irrelevant. Modern historians want to use the incident for other purposes (e.g. to fix the date of the departure of the navy for Narbonensis; see Chilver *ad loc.*) and are hindered by not knowing its date (see also 20.1 n. *proxima pecuniae cura*).

9 *DEINOSIS*

T.'s first major historical work is shaped both by the historiographical priorities just listed and by his attitude towards the world he has chosen to portray. Reason may tell him that the principate was a good or necessary system, but it does not console him for the system's effects. In the words of Eduard Norden, 'he glows with inner fervour' ((1909) 326). In those of Ronald Mellor (1993), 'The future is where historians exercise power, and T. revels in it' (2). As a result, *mala exempla* are not simply *mala*, but *pessima*. To convey his fervour and to exercise his power T. employs a style that eschews complacency. Diction is elevated to new levels of seriousness, syntax's boundaries are challenged, and the arrangement of words and clauses confounds expectations and becomes a major carrier of meaning. The effect of T.'s style is felt in every paragraph of his work and its elements are too various to be discussed in full here. An introductory example and a glance at some elements of style that are particularly effective in *Histories* 1 will suffice to prepare the reader for T.'s powerful prose.[6]

10 ELEVATION

Here again is the opening sentence of chapter 9 together with its parallel in Plutarch (discussed above):

> superior exercitus legatum Hordeonium Flaccum spernebat, senecta ac debilitate pedum inualidum, sine constantia, sine auctoritate.
>
> Flaccus, physically incapacitated by acute gout and without practical experience, was a complete cipher to them. (Plut. *G.* 18.4)

A small detail to begin with: where Plutarch specifies the disease's name, ποδάγρα, T. specifies its effect, *debilitate pedum*, making his expression both

[6] Word choice and arrangement will receive more attention here than syntax since T.'s syntax reflects the usage of his day as well as his own stylistic choices. For an overview of T.'s syntax see the introduction to Furneaux (1884–91), and Draeger (1882) *passim*.

more decorous and more relevant to his argument.[7] Other characteristically Tacitean touches are the compactness of the expression *superior exercitus* as a reference to the legions of Upper Germany, and the abstract nouns (*senecta*, *debilitate*, *constantia*, *auctoritate*). The concluding anaphora illustrates both T.'s deft hand with rhetorical special effects (Plutarch uses a somewhat muddy chiastic antithesis, literally 'incapacitated in body and of affairs inexperienced') and the liberties he takes with loosely attached ablative phrases. T.'s *inualidum* is more precise than Plutarch's ἀδύνατον (Flaccus was not incapacitated, since he did act); it is also a member of T.'s favourite class of adjectives, those compounded with privative *in-* (see below). And finally, the sentence structure consisting of a dense main clause followed by a longer and more elaborate appendix is distinctively Tacitean (Plutarch uses a regular verb-final period).

Put together, these elements yield a unique style that Pliny, speaking of T.'s oratorical style, labelled 'solemn' (*Ep.* 2.11.16 σεμνῶς). Its most important constituents – elevated diction and figured speech – are examined further below.

11 DICTION

An elevated diction opens up to the reader the larger significance of the particulars at hand. Adjectives and nouns compounded by the privative prefix *in-*, for example, both describe something and point to a standard from which it deviates. They appear in great abundance in T.; there are more than sixty in Book 1 alone, ranging from the familiar *inops*, *inimicus*, and *infelix* to the more recherché *inexorabilis* and *infructuosus*.[8] The effect

[7] The following analysis takes Plutarch's version not as a stand-in for the common source, from which T. can then be shown to have deviated, but as another way of developing the same information. If T. is in fact following the source verbatim here (which seems extremely improbable), then the verbal artistry we appreciate is not that of Cornelius Tacitus but of the source author.

[8] Adjectives and adverbs: *ignarus*, *ignauus*, *ignorans*, *ignotus*, *illaesus*, *immemor*, *immensus*, *immoderatus*, *immodicus*, *immotus*, *impar*, *impatiens*, *impenetrabilis*, *imperitus*, *impiger*, *impius*, *improuidus*, *impudicus*, *impune*, *intempestus*, *inanimus*, *inauditus*, *incautus*, *incertus*, *incorruptus*, *incruentus*, *incuriosus*, *indecorus*, *indefensus*, *inermis*, *iners*, *inexorabilis*, *inexpertus*, *infamis*, *infaustus*, *infelix*, *infidus*, *infructuosus*, *ingratus*, *inhonestus*, *inimicus*, *innocens*, *inoffensus*, *inops*, *inquietus*, *insatiabilis*, *inscius*, *insolitus*, *intrepidus*, *intutus*, *inualidus* (3), *irritus*; nouns: *ignauia*, *ignorantia*, *impudentia*, *impunitas*, *incolumitas*, *inertia*, *infirmitas*, *iniuria*, *inopia*, *inscitia*, *intemperies*.

may be studied at 6.1 and 6.2, where T. uses *inualidus*, *ignauissumus*, *inauditus*, *indefensus*, *innocens*, *inermis*, *infaustus*, and *inertia*.

A larger category of words that insist on the general in the particular consists of abstract nouns. Especially characteristic is T.'s use of abstract nouns as subjects of active verbs, as at 80.2 *obsequia meliorum nox abstulerat*. Although the pluperfect *abstulerat* makes this explanation particular to the occasion (contrast the *sententiae* discussed below), *nox*, which encompasses notions ranging from darkness and confusion to danger and licence, gives it a certain amplitude. At 49.1 *Galbae corpus diu neglectum et licentia tenebrarum plurimis ludibriis uexatum* the ablative *licentia tenebrarum* expresses some (but only some) of what is implicit in *nox* at 80.2. (The tone of 80.2 is further elevated by the moral note provided by *obsequia* and *meliorum*.) Even in more common constructions such as *licentia tenebrarum*, abstract nouns, because of their frequency, realize the past as the interplay of large-scale forces. In the fairly typical ch. 12 T. uses *reuerentia*, *arbitrium*, *seditio*, *adoptio*, *sermo*, *licentia*, *libido*, *aetas*, *iudicium*, *amor*, *spes*, *odium*, *actus*, *fortuna*, *cupiditas*, *facilitas*, *metus*, and *praemium*.[9] Abstract nouns are more numerous in passages of analysis and characterization and less numerous in narrative proper – ch. 51, with thirty lines of analysis, has thirty-one abstract nouns, chh. 49–50.1, with thirty lines of character sketch, have thirty, ch. 79, with thirty lines of narrative, has eleven – but there is no paragraph in *Histories* 1 entirely without them. On rare occasions they provide more elevation than a situation calls for, as at 79.2 *lubrico itinerum adempta equorum pernicitate*, which describes an almost farcical scene of horses slipping on ice. A similar expansiveness of reference is provided by impersonal passives and substantive neuter adjectives.

12 METAPHOR

Metaphors, which imply an analogy, are another element of style that allows T. to expand the particular.[10] They are frequently found in combination with other elevation-producing expressions, as at 26.1 *infecit ea tabes legionum quoque et auxiliorum motas iam mentes, postquam uulgatum erat labare Germanici exercitus fidem*. Here T. uses two abstract nouns as subjects for active verbs (*tabes*, *fidem*), an impersonal passive (*uulgatum erat*), and three metaphorical verbs (*infecit*, *motas*, *labare*). Despite the accumulation, this is not a sentence

[9] See further Walker (1976) 116.

[10] For general lists of common Tacitean metaphors see Draeger (1882) §248 and Furneaux (1884–91) §66.

that draws attention to itself; rather, it is of a piece with the surrounding narrative. It is in fact the very ordinariness of metaphors in T. that is so distinctive: what in other prose authors would be ornaments introduced in suitable settings T. uses as basic building blocks. (Unusual metaphors are listed in the index s.v.)

13 *SENTENTIAE*

A more elaborate figure of speech that provides a generalizing and elevating effect is the *sententia*. T.'s contemporary Quintilian defines the *sententia* as a *uox uniuersalis* that is applicable and interesting beyond the particular context of an utterance (*Inst.* 8.5.3). A modern scholar, more concerned with tone than type, attributes to T.'s many *sententiae* the impression the historian gives of being 'master of all he surveys' (Sinclair (1995) 147). T. uses the *sententia* primarily to enunciate the principles governing the (bad) behaviour of groups and individuals. It is one component of what Mellor calls his 'rhetoric of exposure', his programme of revealing truths that had been hidden or simply lost sight of.[11] The groups in question are large (55.1 *insita mortalibus natura*), small (44.2 *tradito principibus more*), and in between (1.3 *incorruptam fidem professis*, 54.3 *faciliore inter malos consensu*, 90.3 *ut in familiis*). Quintilian's chapter on the *sententia* owes its length to the figure's popularity (8.5.1–35). He likens *sententiae* to eyes (*oculi eloquentiae*) even as he urges restraint in their use: 'I don't want eyes all over the body, nor do I want the other limbs to lose their function' (8.5.34). An historian has to exercise particular caution because the figure tends to bring the narrative to a full stop (8.5.27). T. is properly abstemious, and most of his *sententiae* punctuate as well as illuminate (see index s.v.).[12] But T.'s *sententiae* are not quite the sparkling brilliants that Quintilian seems to have in mind: what their light exposes is all too often a grim truth. Among T.'s themes are punishment (3.2, 41.2), crime (12.3, 39.2), misfortune (15.3), suspicion and hatred (21.1), danger (21.2, 56.3, 62.1), failure (39.1), violence (54.3), reluctance (55.1), and self-interest (15.4, 90.3). Master he may be, but his domain

[11] Mellor (1993) 126. Quintilian's favourite metaphor for the figure is that of light: *lumina . . . praecipueque in clausulis posita* (2, cf. 28, 34), *nitere* (19), *scintillae* (29), *oculos eloquentiae* (34), *clarescit* (19).

[12] For example, the sentences after the following *sententiae* are not connected to what precedes: 3.2 *non esse . . . ultionem*, 12.3 *apud infirmum . . . peccaretur*, 15.3 *secundae res . . . corrumpimur*, 39.1 *optima . . . effugerat*, 44.2 *tradito . . . ultionem*, 56.3 *minore discrimine . . . quaeri*, 62.1 *nihil in discordiis . . . esset*, 90.3 *priuata . . . decus publicum*.

appalls him. Some authors, including Quintilian himself in a later part of his chapter, treat epigrams (i.e. expressions of conspicuous verbal neatness, such as 25.1 *suscepere duo manipulares imperium populi Romani transferendum et transtulerunt*) as *sententiae*. Many epigrams, however, including this one, lack the elevating effect of *uoces uniuersales*. For a list of both types see App. 2.

As we have seen, the various elements of Tacitean elevation are generally used to emphasize the darker side of the Roman world in A.D. 69. Ancient rhetorical theory designates this procedure *deinosis*, or 'making terrible' (see Cousin (1951)). Quintilian defines it as 'style adding force to things that are undeserved, harsh, or hateful' (*Inst.* 6.2.24); its relevant emotions are anger, hatred, fear, jealousy, and grief (6.2.20). An orator uses it to involve a judge's passions, particularly in prooemia and epilogues (6.2.20). T. uses it throughout. It is obvious, perhaps too obvious, in a passage such as 40.2:

> igitur milites Romani, quasi Vologaesum aut Pacorum auito Arsacidarum solio depulsuri ac non imperatorem suum inermem et senem trucidare pergerent, disiecta plebe, proculcato senatu, truces armis, rapidi equis forum irrumpunt. nec illos Capitolii aspectus et imminentium templorum religio et priores et futuri principes terruere quo minus facerent scelus cuius ultor est quisquis successit.

The analogy between the Roman emperor and one of the interchangeable foreign dynasts, the venerability and vulnerability of the victim, the violent action (*disiecta*, *proculcato*, *irrumpunt*), the contempt for cultural touchstones (Capitol, temples, past and future *principes*), the moral labels (*scelus*, *ultor*), all of these elements plainly convey outrage. But the most effective medium for Tacitean *deinosis* is much more subtle.

14 APPENDIX SENTENCES

A sentence structure considered characteristic of T. consists of a pithy main clause complete in itself, followed by a subordinate appendix that overwhelms the main clause in length and complexity. There are some fifty-five such sentences in *Histories* 1, or about 13 per cent of its 432 sentences. A few examples will show how much such a structure can contribute to the impact of T.'s narrative. Consider this sentence, which follows the night-time expulsion of some civilians from a legionary camp (|| marks the end of the main clause):

> 54.2 inde atrox rumor, || affirmantibus plerisque interfectos, ac ni sibi ipsi consulerent, fore ut acerrimi militum et praesentia conquesti per tenebras et inscitiam ceterorum occiderentur.

The main clause, three short words, conveys the quality (*atrox* 'horrifying' 'alarming') of the soldiers' talk. What they actually said to one another is reported in the subordinate ablative absolute. *atrox* prepares the reader to interpret the inference the soldiers draw from the rumoured execution as evidence of the near-panic conditions of the camp.[13] A common variation on this structure reserves characterization for the appendix, as in the description of the Helvetii at 67.1:

> irritauerant turbidum ingenium Heluetii, || Gallica gens olim armis uirisque, mox memoria nominis clara, de caede Galbae ignari et Vitellii imperium abnuentes.[14]

In the examples just given the appendix supports the interpretation or attitude expressed in the main clause. Alarm, anger, ignorance, and obstruction all suit T.'s view of the period and this unsettling sentence structure combines with the other elements of style we have examined to give them due prominence. But at 55.1 he uses the same structure to undermine an apparent statement of facts:

> inferioris tamen Germaniae legiones sollemni kalendarum Ianuariarum sacramento pro Galbae adactae, || multa cunctatione et raris primorum ordinum uocibus, ceteri silentio proximi cuiusque audaciam exspectantes, insita mortalibus natura propere sequi quae piget inchoare.

That is, the legions of Lower Germany declared themselves loyal on 1 January, but the declaration meant little given its manner and cause (hesitation, expectant silence, nascent audacity, herd instinct).[15]

[13] In a similarly built sentence at 6.1 the appendix explains *tardum et cruentum*, likewise at 8.2 (*solliciti et irati*), 9.1 (*spernebat*), 13.4 (*spem . . . rapiebat*), 20.1 (*uix decuma portione*), 31.2 (*diffidebatur*).

[14] Cf. 18.1 *contemptorem . . . uitantur*, 26.2 *ignarus . . . peruicax*, 31.2 *infestae . . . Galba*, 45.2 *industriae . . . infensi*, 50.1 *ante . . . crederetur*, 51.4 *super . . . iactabant*, 66.2 *accensis . . . prodigus*, 71.3 *eandem . . . irascebantur*, 79.1 *ad . . . intenta*, 90.2 *crebro . . . sonans*. Still another variation is seen in sentences that seem to end, then offer a comment, either via a noun in apposition (44.2n. *munimentum . . . ultionem*) or a free-floating adverb (65.1n. *crebrius . . . ut*).

[15] Cf. 47.1n. *adnitentibus cunctis*.

The connection between sentence structure and tone is perhaps best illustrated by contrasting two sentences of similar content but different type. The weakening of military discipline is an important theme of the book and T. devotes a number of passages to analysing its causes in specific incidents. The first such occurs at 5.1:

> miles urbanus longo Caesarum sacramento imbutus et ad destituendum Neronem arte magis et impulsu quam suo ingenio traductus, postquam neque dari donatiuum sub nomine Galbae promissum neque magnis meritis ac praemiis eundem in pace quem in bello locum praeuentamque gratiam intellegit apud principem a legionibus factum, pronus ad nouas res scelere insuper Nymphidii Sabini praefecti imperium sibi molientis agitatur.

This is an ordinary historical period: it begins with its subject, ends with its verb, and packs a series of subordinate explanations between the two (*imbutus*, *traductus*, *postquam . . . intellegit*, *pronus*). The sentence is an efficient and fairly matter-of-fact statement of and explanation for the unsettled state of the praetorian guard. There are indeed some slight shadings of black (the selfishness of *praeuentam gratiam*, the moral label *scelere*, the ironic juxtaposition of *praefecti* and *imperium*), but there are also brighter tones (e.g. the antithesis *meritis~praemiis*, which reflects an accepted moral code, and the premise of real loyalty – *ingenio* – to the Julio-Claudian house). The assessment is balanced.

A more negative picture of unsettled loyalties occurs at 31.3:

> Germanica uexilla diu nutauere, || inualidis adhuc corporibus et placatis animis, quod eos a Nerone Alexandriam praemissos atque inde rursus longa nauigatione aegros impensiore cura Galba refouebat.

The main clause here characterizes the behaviour neutrally (see on *nutauere*), but the ablative absolute explains the soldiers' not very creditable reasons for not joining their confrères in abandoning Galba and the causal clause details the attentions they had received from Galba. Despite the element of balance inherent in *nutauere*, then, the appendix only explains why the troops favoured Galba; their inclination for revolt is taken for granted. It would have been possible to accommodate the contrast between *nutauere* and *refouebat* with a concessive clause ('although Galba was reviving the troops, their loyalty wavered'). T.'s sentence, disconcertingly, does not acknowledge that there is anything to explain away.

A majority of the appendix sentences give vivid expression to T.'s generally pessimistic view of the past. But like *sententiae*, these stylistically powerful structures can also provide punctuation, as at 47.2, which concludes the report of the first day of Otho's principate:

> Pisonem Verania uxor ac frater Scribonianus, Titum Vinium Crispina filia composuere, || quaesitis redemptisque capitibus, quae uenalia interfectores seruauerant.

The ablative absolute, chronologically anterior to the main clause, contains the more arresting material and more pungent expression (heads for sale, killers saving); in its posterior position it has a show-stopping effect.

Although appendix sentences are no more numerous than other types, their power is disproportionate. Two reasons may be suggested. First, the looseness of the syntactic connection between the main clause (which requires no supplement) and the appendix demands that the reader determine how the two are related in content: do they agree? conflict? contrast? Where Cicero would supply conjunctions and Caesar or Livy temporal indicators, T. leaves the reader to make sense of his juxtapositions. The reader who does so has been drawn into the text. Harder to analyse, but no less important, is the unsettling effect of having so often to qualify a main clause after the fact. However satisfying a main clause such as *irritauerant turbidum ingenium Heluetii* may seem in itself, it proves insufficient to the complexity that T. wants to convey, which contrasts glory past and future with a present of blind error (67.1, quoted above). These elements could have been presented in a regular period, neatly subordinated to the main event, *irritauerant*. As T. writes it, however, while the main event gets due prominence at the beginning of the sentence, blind error weighs just as heavily at the end and changes the significance of the main event substantially. As a rule in T., the more pithily expressed his main clause is, the more likely it is to be qualified before the sentence comes to an end; the style insists that first thoughts and initial appearances rarely suffice.

15 *VARIATIO*

Histories 1 is not a story of unrelieved gloom. *Bona exempla* are few, but rational analysis takes over at times (as at 5.1, quoted above). The four long speeches in Book 1 are also written in styles very different from that of the narrative (see their introductory notes). In fact, after elevation, variety is

probably the most striking characteristic of T.'s style. As we have seen, even the most distinctive sentence type only accounts for some 13 per cent of his sentences.

The pursuit of variety is perceptible at every level of Tacitean composition from the smallest phrase – he uses both *ut mos est* and *ut moris est* (7.3n.), for example, and refers to the praetorian prefect with at least six different titles (46.1n.) – to paragraphs-long type-scenes (4.2n. *finis Neronis*). *Variatio*'s most familiar manifestations occur where content and prior usage lead the reader to expect parallel phrases or clauses, as after *seu* (9.1n.) or in adverbial expressions modifying a single verb. Plentiful examples of verbal inconcinnity can be found, neatly categorized, in Sörbom (1935) (for passages from Book 1 see index s.v. *uariatio*). Less numerous, but perhaps more significant for the tone of T.'s narrative, are expressions that display what might be called inconcinnity of thought, that is, expressions in which an innocuously parallel form contains two (or more) substantially different kinds of content. A simple (and frequent) type sets a concrete term in parallel with an abstraction, as in *plausus et immodica studia* (35.2) or *strepitus telorum et facies belli* (85.1). More subtle is a statement about the armies of Illyricum, *nec uitiis nec uiribus miscebantur* (9.3), where the alliteration reinforces the parallelism established by *nec . . . nec* but *uires*, when used of armies, denotes not (or not only) moral qualities (which would constitute a proper parallel to *uitia*), but strategic clout. More complex still is the description of Galba on 15 January: *inopia ueri et consensu errantium uictus*. Though *inopia* and *consensu* are parallel ablatives of cause explaining Galba's decision, Galba himself only experiences the *consensus errantium*; T. is the one who perceives *inopia ueri*. The effect of these non-parallel parallels is to roughen the surface of the narrative, to give the reader pause, to offer equivalencies that require thought. And that is really the essential point: T.'s style makes you think. He has been likened to both Cassandra (Mellor (1993) 112) and Oscar Wilde (Cousin (1951) 234), but neither comparison is perfect. T. is no divine mouthpiece, nor does he write to shock. This senator, who had witnessed the beginning of Rome's third dynasty and much else besides, wrote Latin with the depth and texture that were appropriate to the public act of writing history.

16 *HISTORIES* 1

With its story of the struggles of the short-lived emperors Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, and its hints about the off-stage Vespasian, *Histories* 1 is an